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NAVY FORCE EMPLOYMENT FOCUS--BACK TO THE FUTURE

by

D. MARK BROOKS

LCDR USN

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: D. Mark Brooks

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CDR K. Heinz, USN
CDR A. Ross, RN

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Abstract of

NAVY FORCE EMPLOYMENT FOCUS--BACK TO THE FUTURE

Despite numerous doctrinal treatises and "vision" statements in recent years, the Navy continues to seek direction in the post-Cold War era. Much of this dilemma stems from the lack of a cogent definition of the Navy's roles--those broad, enduring aspects of warfare that are critical to success.

A thorough examination of the evolution of recent Navy doctrine and strategy leads to clear roles for the Naval Service--roles that were valid in the past and will be into the foreseeable future. Armed with clarification of these roles, the operational commander can better employ naval forces. The methods for employment of these forces remain those that are tried and true (illustrated emphatically by current events).

Yet, those methods are not without weaknesses. A critical reevaluation and emphasis on the operational function of force protection is an exigency that remains unheeded at our peril.

Back to the Past

Where is the Navy going? The flurry of white papers, vision statements and the use of the word "doctrine" over the past several years should answer the question. Yet many, both in and out of the service, believe the Navy/Marine Corps team is grasping (groping?) for direction in the aftermath of the Cold War. Does the absence of a threat like the Soviet Union mean that the vector the Naval Service had established was incorrect? The answer is an emphatic, *No!*

Though the goal of a 600-ship U.S. Navy is a thing of the past, the force employment focus of that era was right on the mark. With recognition of the changes essential to accommodate reduced force levels, improvement upon methods (particularly with regard to the operational function of force protection) and realization of the contribution of new technologies the Navy must look "back to the future;" for, in the past, exists a cogent plan that identifies the roles of the Naval Service into the foreseeable future. Recognition of these roles will empower the operational commander in the employment (and protection) of naval forces. Not to be confused with "steering by the wake," this is an appeal for learning the lessons of history and avoiding the pitfalls of "change for change sake."

Searching for Direction

Over a decade has passed since the incorporation of the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, better known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA). The naval strategy promulgated as GNA was coming to fruition was "The Maritime Strategy" articulated by

then Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James D. Watkins, in the January 1986 issue of Proceedings.[1] Significantly, and perhaps unfortunately, for the Navy's force and operational planning stability was the unforeseen, rapid collapse of the Soviet Union, the very threat "The Maritime Strategy" appropriately featured. The collapse of the Soviet Union occurred just as the strategy was becoming an important programming, planning and procedural formula for Cold War strategic success--and, as it turned out, surprising near-term victory. This ironically set the Navy adrift with a *seemingly* obsolete doctrine.

The joint focus mandated by GNA gave rise beginning in 1992, to the current Navy vector established with the white paper, ... from the Sea. Since then the process has evolved through Forward ...from the Sea in 1994, and Forward...from the Sea: the Navy Operational Concept in 1997. Each continued the emphasis on littoral operations as the focus of Navy force employment. This was then, and is now, a misguided focus. The effect has been to elevate "operation in the littorals" to the status of primary Naval Service role; it is not.

The narrowed focus on littoral operations by the Navy and Marine Corps is unnecessary. Those operations are what the Navy and its Naval Service partner, the Marine Corps have done in the modern era (post-Pearl Harbor). Countless occasions--including all the major conflicts since that time--have involved the Navy, the Marine Corps, or a combination of the two conducting operations in the littorals. What is needed is a focus on tasks to be accomplished regardless of location, though some perhaps are

[1] James D. Watkins, "The Maritime Strategy," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1986, 2-17.

increasingly critical as operations occur more and more in the littoral areas; such issues will be discussed later.

Even more disconcerting are the deleterious effects of a shift in emphasis away from primary roles. In ...from the Sea, it is suggested that "our national maritime policies can afford to de-emphasize efforts in some naval warfare areas."[2] This document also acknowledged the enduring roles of sea control, power projection, strategic deterrence and strategic lift for American Naval Forces. The Naval Service would have been better served to continue focusing on these proven roles, methods of force employment and the operational functions that are critical to their success.

So, with all the efforts post-GNA and in the wake of the Cold War to revamp Navy policy, is it possible that the focus was correct all along? Did not the Naval Service routinely operate "in the littorals," and wasn't this its forte' anyway? The answer is clearly, *Yes*. This is not to say that progress and change (some) aren't necessary and beneficial. But, the U. S. Navy had a cogent strategy over a decade ago: "The Maritime Strategy." It was a foundation applicable after the fall of the USSR. Remove the Soviet Union from this doctrine and insert the next power that will surely come along. If there is no major power threat (as is the case presently), that does not obviate the concepts of the strategy or its guiding principles.

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[2] U.S. Department of the Navy, ...from the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century. (Washington, D.C.: September 1992), 1-2.

What's in a Name?

Much of current debate over service direction and employment centers around labels and terminology. Of note, Navy documents prior to GNA often utilized the terms role, mission, and function in ways that are counter to current Joint parlance. A relatively new term in the military lexicon, of some utility, is "core competency." Yet this term utilized by the 1995 Commission on Roles and Missions (CORM) seems inextricably tied to the Commission's limited (if any) success at elucidating the "core competencies" of the services.

As one author noted, "This crazy quilt of Service core competencies produces more confusion than understanding, thus working at cross purposes to the Commission's intent."[3] In fact, the Commission's, "...core competencies presented have a somewhat arbitrary, even random quality to them."[4] The CORM lists *exactly* three core competencies for each service. Why? Is there a requirement that all of the services have the same number? Of course not. Additionally, the core competencies listed for the Navy are primarily (with one valid exception: power projection) operational functions. The debate over labels, roles or core competencies, is semantics. Since "words do matter," (frequently noted at the Naval War College) "The Maritime Strategy" is the place to find the *roles* that are as applicable to today's Naval Service as they were in 1986:

Sea Control
Power Projection
Strategic Deterrence
Strategic Lift

[3]Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "Missed Opportunities: An Assessment of the Roles & Missions Commission Report," Defense Budget Project, August 1995, 31.
[4] ibid., 30.

These Navy-unique capabilities remain essential and must be brought to bear in support of National Security/Military Strategy. Foremost among those is Sea Control. It is critical whether as a goal in and of itself or as an enabling capability for the other three. Power Projection, though not unique in that the other two services can provide it, is special when the modifiers Carrier Battle Group and Amphibious Ready Group precede it. Those aspects of the Naval Service provide a component of power projection that is singular to the maritime branch of the military. Strategic Deterrence too is not unique to the Navy, unless it is that leg of the triad (likely the most survivable) provided by ballistic missile submarines. Finally, Strategic Lift in the amount that is required to fight and win wars (still the highest priority of our military forces as delineated in the National Military Strategy) can only be provided by the sea services.

The focus here is on the roles involving offensive action. If it is accepted that Strategic Deterrence and Lift are best when not involved in such action-- since failure of deterrence (i.e. nuclear war) would be required with the former and mostly unarmed logistic ships compose the latter--what then are the means by which naval forces should be employed to accomplish the action-oriented roles of Sea Control and Power Projection?

Staying the Course

The Naval Service's vehicles for accomplishing these roles should remain, as they have since the Second World War, those currently in use: the Carrier Battle Group (CVBG) and Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). Into the foreseeable future, these units

will serve us well just as they have for nearly six decades. Consider this from "The Maritime Strategy:" "Between 1946 and 1982, in some 250 instances of employment of American military forces, naval forces constituted the principal element of our response in about 80% of the crises."[5] The units of employment during that period were, for the most part, the same CVBGs and ARGs utilized today; and, the use of military force as a tool of national strategy continues unabated. "Since 1990, U.S. armed forces have been utilized in 36 foreign missions...according to analysis by the Congressional Research Service."[6] A large share of these responses have been by the Naval Service, and of those, many have been by these same CVBGs and ARGs. This begs the colloquialism, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Despite the supposedly new focus in naval doctrine with the evolution of the ...from the Sea treatises, these tools of Sea Control and Power Projection have been a common theme: "[O]ur basic presence 'building blocks' remain *Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups*--with versatile, multipurpose, naval tactical aviation wings--and *Amphibious Ready Groups*--with special operations-capable Marine Expeditionary Units. These highly flexible naval formations are valued by the theater commanders precisely because they provide the necessary capabilities forward."[7](Note: *Ready on arrival)*

Too, this idea coincides with employment options seen by current Navy leadership. Consider this statement, endorsed by the Chief of Naval Operations, on the subject of how the Navy operates:

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[5] Watkins, 8.
[6] Richard J. Newman, "Can Peacekeepers Make War?," U.S. News and World Report, 19 January 1998, 40.
[7] U.S. Department of the Navy, Forward...from the Sea. (Washington, D.C.: September 1994), 4.

"We will deploy carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups with embarked Marines to provide naval expeditionary forces for the Combatant Commanders. When required, we deploy separate units--such as for maritime interception force operations--but each remains capable of being integrated into a larger naval expeditionary force. We train carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups together to ensure immediate readiness for a wide range of contingencies."[8]

Even architects of new command structure ideas such as the Naval Expeditionary Task Force (albeit moribund) acknowledge the efficacy of organizations implicit to the CVBG and ARG utilizing current doctrine: "Carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups seem to be functioning just fine without a command structure makeover..."[9]

Contrary to the pundit's cry, current methods of force employment are not only time-tested, but more relevant than ever. As of this writing, three CVBGs are assembling in the Persian Gulf for the latest (and principal) show of force toward Iraq, if not Power Projection strikes. During recent years, in spite of the supposed revolution in military affairs, the prevalence of such action has *increased.* Though the other services have greatly contributed to the mission of forward presence, "...naval forces increasingly will constitute the U.S. military presence overseas and increasingly will be seen as representatives of the entire range of U.S. military power."[10] This in an era when many see naval forces as irrelevant and look to the global reach of other services to "fill the void." In fact, the other services are feeling the effects of forward engagement and presence while simultaneously downsizing.

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[8] U.S. Department of the Navy, Forward...From the Sea: The Navy Operational Concept. (Washington, D.C.: March 1997), 3.
[9] T. J. McKearney, "CNEF, We Hardly Knew Ye," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1998, 10.
[10] William A. Owens, "Naval Voyage to an Uncharted World," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, December 1994, 31.

Recent news magazines cite epidemic pilot retention and training problems in the U.S. Air Force as relatively new forward deployment cycles take their toll.[11] To be sure, Naval Aviation units are subject to the same difficulties, yet the corporate knowledge and built-in infrastructure of many decades of forward deployments go a long way toward mitigating these problems. The CVBG and ARG don't just continue to be viable tools of national policy, they become more and more attractive (and essential).

Force Protection: a Key Operational Function

Of key concern is the operational function that has been neglected with the advent of the littoral focus, that is force protection. While the proactive, offensive thinking that has accompanied forward, engaged presence is welcome, the by-product has been an eschewing of critical defensive areas. Enigmatically, more and more is said of the increased danger in the world, the proliferation of threatening weapons and technologies. Yet, mere lip service is paid to the most crucial of areas: preservation of assets and personnel.

An example is illustrated in a subtle, almost sub-conscious way. In recent years, the key Navy warfare areas of anti-air and anti-submarine warfare (AAW and ASW) became air and undersea warfare (AW and USW)--an attempt to move away from the more defensive/reactive sounding terms. Though some would say this is merely semantics and unworthy of concern, it is such well-intentioned changes that have

[11] Richard J. Newman, "Christmas in a Desert Camp and Asking Why," U.S. News and World Report, 29 December 1997-5 January 1998, 30-33; "Can Peacekeepers Make War?," U.S. News and World Report, 19 January 1998, 39-44.

influenced many to concentrate on newer, elegant ideas like information warfare and precision engagement at the expense of what is the most important of all an operational commander's responsibilities: unit/collective self-defense. The commander's inherent right/obligation of unit/collective self-defense is equal in importance to all other factors in planning and execution, especially in the littorals. This is not to say that much good work has not been done in these areas; for example, medium-range and littoral air defense tactics have received a fair amount of attention in recent years. But, it is not yet at the necessary level nor with the emphasis needed.

A recent Proceedings article illuminates this lack of emphasis and the resultant problems with regard to air defense:

> "Overlooked in the Navy's desperate lunge to operate jointly with its sister services is its inability to integrate its own warfare communities--and the pursuit of air supremacy is a glaring example. The Navy's training limitations prevent it from creating a battle space condition it claims is a precondition for its highest priority: war fighting in the littorals."[12]

This is of ever increasing importance as naval assets continue to operate in littoral regions (e.g. continued CVBG presence in the Persian Gulf). Previous problems with Navy tactical aviation--unacceptable fighter kill ratios in Vietnam and strike warfare shortcomings highlighted by the poor showing in Lebanon, in 1983--led to the establishment of warfare centers designed to ameliorate these problems (Navy Fighter Weapons School, or TopGun and Naval Strike Warfare Center, or "Strike U," respectively). When it comes to littoral air defense, "Are we waiting for an Iranian

[12] Camilo O'Kuinghttons, Jr., "We Need an Air Defense Center of Excellence," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, October 1997, 65.

shooter to penetrate our defenses [again] and put a missile into one of our carriers [or other ships] before we do something?"[13]

Likewise anti-submarine warfare, formerly the pride and emphasis of the attack submarine community, has taken a back seat to other missions as the Cold War drifts farther into memory... though just over a decade away. Without the specter of the huge Soviet submarine fleet, more and more time is spent concentrating on expected littoral missions such as intelligence-gathering, minefield emplacement, hitting high-value targets on land with Tomahawk missiles, or landing special forces teams.[14] Again, the offensive, proactive thinking here is welcomed. Yet, the force defense measure of anti-submarine warfare--crucial if our naval assets are to contribute in the littoral regions--must remain foremost on the list of submarine warfare priorities. The quantum advantage that ought to be maintained by U.S. submarine forces in this area, not so much in equipment but in the training and readiness of personnel, must not be squandered.

Perhaps the importance of force protection is best highlighted by this excerpt from the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the use of naval forces in the overseas presence mission: "If potential predators see those forces as relatively invulnerable, then the fact that they are visible and within striking distance works to inhibit the regional aggression. If they see them as easy targets, it doesn't."[15]

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[13] ibid., 66.
[14] John Roos, "Future of US' Attack Sub Fleet Depends Less on Finding New Missions Than on Shedding Light on What It's Been Doing All Along," Armed Forces Journal International, May 1993, 30-32.
[15] "Naval Voyage to an Uncharted World," 31.

On Technology and Innovation

Of course, all of the above is irrelevant if the explosion of information systems and technological innovation--the "revolution in military affairs" (RMA)--makes current doctrine, force employment methods and even identification of operational functions obsolete. Many intelligent, experienced people have espoused this idea; and, they sound the call to arms--to exotic new arms and methods of warfare ("information warfare") unfathomable just a few short years ago. Yet, even the champions of this cause point to clear problems. Foremost is the reality of current events: fiscal austerity. "Obviously, the budget is not going to increase."[16]

The focus here is on force employment, not procurement. Yet, if one accepts that the recently completed Quadrennial Defense Review is the blueprint for future force structure, then it is clear that dollars available for defense will continue to decrease. Certainly if "past is prologue" of the future, research and development of these new technologies will take a large share of this decreasing budget. And what of today? There is no clearly defined superpower threat as during the Cold War. Just as the end of that era and the fall of the Soviet Union was quite unforeseen, might there be a new--quite unforeseen-- threat right over the horizon?

Certainly there are candidates. Regardless, the focus here is on utilization and improvement *today*. No matter what direction force procurement takes, more concentration is needed on force employment now. Heads must not be buried in the sand.

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[16] William A. Owens, "The Emerging System of Systems," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, May 1995, 39.

As a final note on this subject, consider one author's observation on the limits of innovation during the conflict in Southeast Asia:

"Innovation proved quite possible--but not in all circumstances, not for all purposes, and not always to positive effect. In fact, in some cases, innovation may have brought more harm than good, more risk than opportunity. The difficulty lay largely in calling correctly where innovation turned into excess, where the effort to transcend old operational limits and restraints foundered on its own complexity and cost, and where innovation became an expression of preference about the war one wished to fight rather than an appropriate adaptation to the conflict that was actually in progress."[17]

Back to the Future

Nothing earth-shattering here... perhaps that is the point. As technological and informational breakthroughs occur each and every day, it's time to take a deep breath and assess just what is important.

Key to our focus in the Naval Service, is a clear distinction of the guiding roles that govern our operations here and now, as well as in the foreseeable future. The broad, enduring tasks that the Naval Service must be able to accomplish remain Sea Control, Power Projection, Strategic Deterrence and Strategic Lift. These roles were clearly elucidated in "The Maritime Strategy." That strategic imperative came from years of examining the need to defeat the Soviet threat across the spectrum of conflict. Many of its concepts for naval warfare remain relevant today.

As operational commanders are inundated with new force employment options, one thing remains clear: for the employment of naval forces, the CVBG and ARG remain the method of choice, critics and champions of RMA notwithstanding. Improvements in

[17] Donald J Mrozek, Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam: Ideas and Actions (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, January 1988), 123.

technology will always be welcome. The units that make up today's CVBG and ARG bristle with the manifestations of American intellect and tactical know-how. Finding ways to do things better must never be eschewed; however, it must be kept in context. Scrapping six decades of proven effectiveness is not the answer.

Yet, if the basics of our profession are not honed (e.g. force protection) the scrapping of our forces may occur anyway at the hands of our next opponent; and, that may happen next year, next month or... tomorrow.

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